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The Epic of Gilgamesh

By Vickie Chao

A long, long time ago, there was a kingdom called Uruk. Its ruler was Gilgamesh.

Gilgamesh, by all accounts, was not an ordinary person. He was actually a superhuman, two-thirds god and one-third human. As king, Gilgamesh was very harsh. His people were scared of him and grew wary over time. They pleaded with the sky god, Anu, for his help. In response, Anu asked the goddess Aruru to create a beast-like man who had the same strength as Gilgamesh. He called the wild man Enkidu and let him roam free in the forest.



At first, nobody knew about Enkidu. But then, a hunter spotted him near a waterhole three days in a row. He was terrified and ran home to tell his father what he saw. His father urged him to go to Uruk and relay the story to Gilgamesh. So he did. Just as the father had predicated, Gilgamesh gave the young man a beautiful woman named Shamhat and asked him to use her as bait. After the young man returned, he and Shamhat went to the forest to wait for Enkidu. When Enkidu finally showed up, Shamhat seduced him. She made him fall in love with her. This new experience made Enkidu a changed man, and the animals felt it, too. For the first time, they did not welcome him to their crowd. Worse yet, he could no longer run alongside them as he used to do. Turning around, he went back to Shamhat. She comforted him. She told him that she would take him to Uruk. She would show him how to eat, speak, and dress properly. She would introduce him to Gilgamesh. And she promised him that Gilgamesh was the only man worthy of his friendship.

True to her words, Shamhat taught Enkidu everything she knew. The only thing she did not count on was the terrible clash between Enkidu and Gilgamesh. When Enkidu met Gilgamesh the first time, he found the man appalling. Right away, he challenged the king and engaged him in a fierce fight. But he lost. After the defeat, Enkidu accepted

Gilgamesh's superiority. They hugged and became best friends.

Always eager to build a name for himself, Gilgamesh wanted to have an adventure. He wanted to go to the Cedar Forest and slay its guardian demon, Humbaba. Enkidu did not like the idea. He knew Humbaba from his days running wild in the forest. He tried to talk his best friend out of it. But Gilgamesh refused to listen. Reluctantly, Enkidu agreed to go with him.

After several days of journeying, Gilgamesh and Enkidu at last reached the edge of the Cedar Forest. Their intrusion made Humbaba very angry. But thankfully, with the help of the sun god, Shamash, the duo prevailed. They killed Humbaba and cut down the forest. They fashioned a raft out of the cedar trees. Together, they set sail along the Euphrates River and made their way back to Uruk. The only shadow cast over this victory was Humbaba's curse. Before he was beheaded, he shouted, "Of you two, may Enkidu not live the longer, may Enkidu not find any peace in this world!"

When Gilgamesh and Enkidu arrived at Uruk, they received a hero's welcome. The goddess of love, Ishtar, saw how handsome Gilgamesh was. She wanted to be his lover. But Gilgamesh refused and taunted her. With her pride bruised, Ishtar went to see her father, Anu. She begged him to let her use the Bull of Heaven to destroy Gilgamesh and his city. She threatened to smash the gates of hell if Anu did not give in to her wish. Seeing no other option, Anu agreed and unleashed the Bull of Heaven. As mighty as the Bull of Heaven was, it was still no match for Gilgamesh and Enkidu. Once again, the two teamed up and slew the beast.

After that episode, Enkidu fell sick. To his dismay, he found out that his illness was a punishment from the gods. As it turned out, the gods held a meeting among themselves. They wanted to hold somebody responsible for the death of Humbaba and the Bull of Heaven. Since Gilgamesh was two-thirds god, he was forgiven. That meant Enkidu must die for insulting the deities.

Needless to say, Enkidu found the whole thing extremely unfair! While he lay dying, he lamented his fate. He cursed the hunter who found him. He cursed Shamhat who seduced him. But after the sun god had a chat with him, Enkidu felt calm again. He realized that he did have a good life, however short it had been. That final realization set his mind in peace. Several days later, he died.

Enkidu's death shattered Gilgamesh completely. For a long while, he could not do anything at all. As he mourned for his personal loss, he